Beat: Local

Senate approves overhaul of Prince Georges County School Board

Baker MUST be accountable for Results

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USPA NEWS - The Maryland Senate approved legislation Thursday evening that approves a partial takeover of the Prince George's County school system by County Executive Rushern L. Baker, and creates a hybrid school board model that is the first ever in the state of Maryland and unique to Prince George's County.

The revised plan approved by a vote of 39-to-7 in the Senate, will among other things, allow County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III to select the county school system's new superintendent as well as choose the chair and vice chair of an expanded Board of Education.

The County Executive will select the new Superintendent from a list of three recommendations provided by an executive search committee appointed by Governor Martin O'Malley and the Chair of the State Board of Education.

According to the legislation passed by Senate lawmakers, the nine-member elected school board will remain entact, receive four additional appointed members, and retain control of the $1.7 billion school budget. Three of the four new members would be appointed by the county executive, and the remaining member appointed by the county council. The additional appointees must possess specific qualifications and skill sets. In addition, the chair and vice chair appointed by the county executive must come from the current elected school board.

Also in the legislation approved by the Senate, the superintendent is the chief executive officer of the Prince George's County School System and remains the employee of, and answerable to the school board, but places limitations on the school board's ability to micro manage day-to-day operations; requiring a two-thirds vote to override any action taken by the superintendent.

Current school board chair Verjeana Jacobs told the Associated Press that she and the school board remain opposed to the bill and County Executive Baker's continued attempts to userp power and takeover the school system.

"We can't have such a structural overhaul of our system, which is what this is, without someone doing a better job of explaining what it's going to look like in terms of outcomes and results," Jacobs said. "Where is the plan for academic achievement? Where is the plan for how we are going to do better?"

Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller citing County Executive Baker's proven passion and commitment to the children of Prince George's County, urged the body to adopt the proposal and pass the legislation immediately.

"This is our last best chance. It has to work," the Senate President said. "We need someone to hold accountable. This makes the county executive, who is going to be appointing the superintendent, primarily responsible."

On the Senate floor Thursday evening, Senator C. Anthony Muse, a Prince George's County democrat, urged his colleagues passionately to reject the legislation, and allow the matter to be studied, and best practices identified over the next nine months. "This is no plan," Muse said, "it's a bridge to nowhere."

Senator Joanne C. Benson, a democrat from Landover, and retired educator of 40 years, in the Prince George's County School System said she is in Annapolis for 2 reasons; the children and senior citizens of Prince George's County, and she refuses to sit back and wait while our schools continue to decline and fail our children.

The "compromise" legislation now goes to the House of Delegates for approval prior to Monday nights Sine Die adjournment at midnight. Being emergency legislation it becomes law and effective immediately upon receiving Governor Martin O'Malley's signature, which is expected.

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